

Child Safe Environment Policy

Section 1: Commitment to the Safety of Children and Young People

Forest School S.A is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people participating in our programs. We comply with the Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017, Child Safety (Prohibited Persons) Act 2016, and the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations. Bullying and harassment will not be tolerated. Children and young people are valued and respected. We embrace all children and young people regardless of their abilities, sex, gender, or socioeconomic or cultural background, and uphold equity. A child-safe culture is championed and modelled at all levels of the organisation, from the top down and bottom up.

To ensure the safety of children and young people, Forest School S.A takes the following steps:

- **Registration with DHS Screening Unit:** Forest School S.A is registered with the DHS Screening Unit and has linked all Working with Children Checks (WWCCs) to the organisation.
- **Verification of WWCCs:** Forest School S.A verifies all volunteers' WWCCs through the DHS Screening Unit portal before they commence work with children and young people. For employees, the organisation verifies their WWCC renewal every 5 years and ensures the status remains 'not prohibited'.
- **Advising the Screening Unit:** Forest School S.A advises the Screening Unit when the organisation becomes aware of certain information

regarding any person involved with the organisation, including any serious criminal offence, child protection information, or disciplinary or misconduct information.

Section 2: Volunteer Recruitment Process

Forest School S.A's volunteer recruitment process involves the following steps to ensure the suitability of volunteers working with children and young people:

- **Police Check:** All volunteers are required to undergo a police check.
- **Verified WWCC:** Volunteers must have a verified Working with Children Check (WWCC) before commencing work with children and young people.
- **Relevant Qualifications:** Volunteers should have relevant qualifications, such as a teaching degree or early childhood educator certification.
- **Two References:** Volunteers are required to provide two references.
- **Face-to-Face Interview:** Volunteers undergo a face-to-face interview that includes behavioural questions related to child safeguarding.

Forest School S.A is committed to providing a safe and supportive environment for all children and young people involved in our programs. We will continue to review and improve our recruitment processes to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

Induction Process

Forest School S.A's induction process is designed to ensure that all staff and volunteers understand and adhere to child safeguarding requirements. This includes training and information on mandatory reporting, cultural safety, record-keeping, supervision, and information sharing.

- **Mandatory Reporting:** All staff and volunteers are trained on their obligations regarding mandatory reporting of child abuse or neglect. They are provided with clear guidelines on how to recognize signs of abuse or neglect and the steps to take if they have concerns.
- **Cultural Safety:** Forest School S.A is committed to providing a culturally safe environment for all children and young people. Our induction process includes training on cultural safety, respect for diversity, and understanding the cultural backgrounds of the children and families we serve.
- **Record Keeping:** Forest School S.A maintains accurate and up-to-date records of all staff and volunteers, including their Working with Children Check (WWCC) status, qualifications, and training. This information is securely stored and easily accessible to relevant personnel.
- **Supervision:** Forest School S.A provides ongoing supervision and support to all staff and volunteers working with children and young people. This includes regular check-ins, feedback sessions, and opportunities for further training and development.
- **Information Sharing:** Forest School S.A has clear guidelines for the sharing of information about children and young people. Information is shared on a need-to-know basis and in accordance with privacy laws and regulations.

Forest School S.A is committed to providing a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment for all children and young people. Our induction process plays a crucial role in ensuring that all staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to uphold our child safeguarding requirements.

Section 2: Scope of policy

This policy applies to all individuals involved in Forest School S.A, including employees, volunteers, contractors, and work experience students. We require all personnel to agree in writing to accept and act in accordance with this policy.

Section 3: Communication

Forest School S.A makes our child safe policy and procedures available to children, young people, and families through our website, information sessions, and printed materials. We provide the child safe policy to our workers during induction and ongoing training. We encourage children and young people to participate and provide feedback through surveys, questionnaires, and youth committees or focus groups. We inform children and young people about their rights, including their right to safety and the right to be listened to. We educate children and young people on what harm is and develop their understanding of protective practices. We involve families in how we operate, including encouraging their children to provide feedback. We have a child-friendly version of this policy available upon request.

Section 4: Code of Conduct

Forest School SA is committed to providing a safe and respectful environment for all children and young people participating in our programs. Our Code of Conduct outlines the expected standards of behaviour for all staff, volunteers, parents, and workers involved in our organisation.

Forest School SA and volunteers are responsible for promoting and protecting the well-being of young people by:

Promoting:

- Creating a safe and inclusive environment for all children and young people.
- Encouraging positive and respectful interactions among children, young people, and adults.
- Supporting the individual needs and abilities of each child and young person.
- Providing opportunities for learning, growth, and development in a natural outdoor setting.
- Acting as positive role models for children and young people.

Protecting:

- Ensuring the physical and emotional safety of all children and young people.
- Treating all students/families/volunteers with respect regardless of race, sex, ability, religion or attributes.
- Setting clear professional boundaries
- Responding quickly and fairly to any feedback raised by children, families or the community
- Following all policies and procedures related to child safety and protection.
- Reporting any concerns or suspicions of abuse or harm to the Child Abuse Report Line (CARL)
- Respecting the privacy and confidentiality of children and young people.

Forest School SA and Volunteers must not:

- Engage in any form of abuse, neglect, or harm towards children and young people.
- Discriminate against or harass any child, young person, or fellow worker.
- Use inappropriate language or behaviour in the presence of children and young people.
- Ignore or dismiss any concerns raised by children, young people, or their families.
- Engage in any behaviour that may compromise the safety or wellbeing of children and young people.

Consequences of Breaching the Code of Conduct

Any worker found to have breached the Code of Conduct may face disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment or volunteering role.

Serious breaches may also be reported to the relevant authorities for further investigation.

Accessing the Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct is available to all staff, volunteers, parents, and workers on the Forest School SA website and in printed form upon request.

Link to Complaints Management Policy

The Code of Conduct is linked to Forest School SA's Complaints Management Policy. Any concerns or complaints regarding breaches of the Code of Conduct will be managed in accordance with this policy.

Empowering and Supporting Workers

Forest School SA is committed to empowering and supporting workers to draw attention to breaches of the Code of Conduct and challenge inappropriate behaviours. Workers are encouraged to raise any concerns they may have and will be supported throughout the process.

Section 5: Recruitment

Forest School S.A is committed to ensuring that only the most suitable people are engaged to work or volunteer with children and young people, in accordance with National Principle 5. To achieve this, we have implemented the following procedures:

- **Working with Children Check (WWCC):** Forest School S.A and its workers who work with children or young people have a current, 'not prohibited' Working with Children Check (WWCC) issued by the DHS Screening Unit.
- **Registration with DHS Screening Unit:** Forest School S.A is registered with the DHS Screening Unit and has linked all WWCCs to the organisation.
- **Verification of WWCC:** Forest School S.A verifies the accuracy of the WWCC before employing workers to work with children and young people. For existing employees, the organisation ensures they renew their WWCC every 5 years and that the status remains as 'not prohibited'. Verification is done online through the Organisation Portal via the DHS Screening Unit.
- **Advising the Screening Unit:** Forest School S.A advises the Screening Unit when the organisation becomes aware of certain information regarding any person involved with the organisation, including any serious

criminal offence, child protection information, or disciplinary or misconduct information.

- **Relevant Qualifications:** Volunteers should have relevant qualifications, such as a teaching degree or early childhood educator certification.
- **Face-to-Face Interview:** Volunteers undergo a face-to-face interview that includes behavioural questions related to child safeguarding.

Forest School S.A is committed to complying with all relevant laws, regulations, and standards related to the recruitment of personnel working with children and young people. We will regularly review and update our recruitment procedures to ensure that they remain effective and compliant.

Section 6: Training, supervision and support for workers

Forest School SA provides specific training for volunteers regarding child safe environments and mandatory reporting. This training covers topics such as recognizing signs of abuse or harm, understanding mandatory reporting obligations, and promoting a child-safe culture. Volunteers are required to undergo this training annually to ensure they remain up-to-date with best practices and legal requirements.

- Forest School SA and Volunteers must be up to date with the DHS Mandatory notification booklet
- Have a current Responding to Risk of Harm, Abuse and Neglect Training Certificate
- Complete the Forest SA induction day
- Complete professional development in compliance with early childhood educator/ teacher registration
- Meeting will include child safety as a standing item and reflections of child safeguarding

Supervision:

Forest School SA provides regular supervision for all workers, including volunteers. This supervision includes check-ins, feedback sessions, and opportunities for volunteers to raise any concerns or seek guidance. Supervision helps to ensure that volunteers feel supported and have the resources they need to fulfil their roles effectively.

Support:

Forest School SA offers various forms of support for workers, including access to a designated Child Safety Officer who can provide guidance on child safety issues. Volunteers are also encouraged to participate in regular debriefing sessions to discuss any challenging situations they may have encountered and receive emotional support if needed. Volunteers are provided a copy of this document.

Cultural Competency Training:

Forest School SA provides cultural competency training for all volunteers. This training includes content on how to build culturally safe environments, respect cultural diversity, and engage effectively with children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds. This training helps to ensure that all workers are sensitive to the cultural needs of the children and families we serve.

Forest School SA is committed to providing comprehensive training, supervision, and support for all workers to ensure the safety and well-being of children and young people in our programs.

Section 7: Reporting and responding to harm or risk of harm

Definition of Harm: Harm refers to any form of abuse, neglect, or exploitation that results in actual or potential harm to a child or young person's physical, emotional, or psychological well-being.

Mandatory Reporting: Forest School SA and all volunteers at Forest School SA are considered mandatory notifiers. This means that they have a legal obligation to report to the Child Abuse Report Line (CARL) on 13 14 78, or if the child is at immediate risk, to South Australia Police (SAPOL) on 000, if they have a reasonable belief that a child or young person has been harmed or is at risk of harm.

Reporting Process: Reports regarding the reasonable belief that a child or young person is, or may be, at risk of harm are to be made directly to CARL or SAPOL. In cases involving Aboriginal children and young people, support is provided by Yaitya Tirramangkotti - an Aboriginal team, via the CARL number. Information about making appropriate reports of harm or risk of harm is available from the South Australian Department of Child Protection website: [Child Protection SA Reporting Child Abuse](#).

Internal Reporting: While a mandated notifier is not required to make an internal report after reporting to CARL/SAPOL, it is encouraged. However, the individual who identifies the harm or risk of harm is the person who makes the report to CARL/SAPOL, and this is not reported internally for another worker to determine if it is a reportable matter.

Legal Obligations: All adult workers at Forest School SA have a legal obligation to report child abuse to the police and to protect a child from abuse. Failure to meet these obligations may be considered a criminal offence.

Ensuring Safety of Children and Young People: If a worker has been reported to CARL/SAPOL regarding an allegation of harm to a child or young person, Forest School SA will take immediate action to ensure the safety of all children and young people in our organisation. This may include suspending the worker pending the outcome of the investigation, implementing additional safeguards and supervision measures, and providing support to affected children, young people, and families.

Support for Children, Young People, and Families: Forest School SA is committed to providing support to children, young people, and their families after a report to CARL/SAPOL has been made. This may include providing access to counselling services, connecting families with appropriate support agencies, and offering ongoing support and assistance as needed.

Forest School SA takes the safety and well-being of children and young people seriously and is committed to ensuring that all necessary steps are taken to protect them from harm.

Section 8: Reporting and responding to general complaints or feedback

Informing Children, Young People, and Families:

Forest School SA informs children, young people, and their families that they can provide feedback or make a complaint through various channels, including:

- Direct communication during program activities, ensuring child-friendly language is used.

- Posters displayed in prominent locations that provide information on how to make a complaint or provide feedback in a child-friendly format.
- Information on the Forest School SA website and in printed materials that is easily accessible to children, young people, and families.

Ways to Provide Feedback or Make a Complaint:

Children, young people, and their families can provide feedback or make a complaint through the following channels:

- Verbal communication to a staff member or volunteer.
- Written communication, such as a letter or email, addressed to the designated Complaints Officer.
- Anonymously, through a suggestion box or feedback form.

Procedure for Managing Complaints:

Forest School SA follows a structured procedure to manage complaints, which includes:

- Recording the complaint in a complaints register.
- Acknowledging receipt of the complaint within a specified timeframe.
- Conducting an investigation, if necessary, to gather relevant information.
- Providing a response to the complainant, outlining the outcome of the investigation and any actions taken.
- Reviewing the complaints management process to identify any areas for improvement.

Emphasis on Safety:

Forest School SA's complaints management processes emphasise the safety of children and young people. All complaints are taken seriously and are handled promptly and confidentially to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants.

Training for Workers:

Forest School SA provides training for all volunteers to recognize and respond to complaints and feedback. This training includes:

- Understanding the importance of complaints and feedback in improving services.
- Recognizing the signs of different types of complaints and how to respond appropriately.
- Ensuring that complaints are handled sensitively and in accordance with Forest School SA's policies and procedures.

Posters:

Forest School SA has posters displayed in prominent locations that advise children and young people how to make complaints and provide feedback. These posters use child-friendly language and include illustrations or images to make them more accessible to children and young people.

Forest School SA is committed to providing a safe and supportive environment for all children, young people, and their families. We welcome feedback and complaints as valuable opportunities for improvement and will ensure that they are handled appropriately and with sensitivity.

Section 9: Risk Management

Specific Risks to Children and Young People at Forest School SA

Physical Risks:

- Trips, slips, and falls on uneven terrain or natural obstacles.
- Burns or cuts from campfires or outdoor tools.
- Allergic reactions to plants, insects, or wildlife.

Environmental Risks:

- Exposure to heat and sun
- Getting lost or separated from the group in unfamiliar surroundings.

Wellbeing Risks:

- Emotional distress or anxiety from being in a new and challenging environment.
- Feeling overwhelmed or pressured by outdoor activities.

Actions to Minimise and Manage Risks

Risk Assessments: Conduct thorough risk assessments of the forest school site and activities to identify potential hazards and implement appropriate control measures.

Safety Briefings: Provide comprehensive safety briefings to all children, young people, and accompanying adults before starting any activities. Include information on hazards, emergency procedures, and expected behaviour.

Supervision: Ensure that there is adequate supervision by trained staff and volunteers at all times. Maintain appropriate staff-to-child ratios to ensure that all children and young people are adequately supervised.

First Aid: Have qualified first aiders on-site and equipped with appropriate first aid kits to respond to any injuries or medical emergencies.

Emergency Procedures: Establish and communicate clear emergency procedures for different scenarios, including getting lost, injuries, or severe weather events. Ensure that all staff and volunteers are familiar with these procedures.

Equipment Safety: Regularly inspect and maintain all equipment used in forest school activities to ensure they are safe and in good working condition.

Allergies and Medical Conditions: Obtain information about any allergies or medical conditions of children and young people participating in forest school activities. Take necessary precautions and have emergency medication on hand if needed.

Emotional Support: Provide emotional support to children and young people who may feel overwhelmed or anxious. Encourage open communication and offer opportunities for children to express their feelings.

Training: Provide training to staff and volunteers on risk management, child protection, and emergency procedures. Ensure they are competent in their roles and responsibilities.

Regular Reviews: Conduct regular reviews of policies, procedures, and risk assessments to ensure they remain effective and up-to-date with current best practices.

Section 10: Policy Review

Forest School SA is committed to regularly evaluating and reviewing our Child Safe Environment Policy and related procedures to ensure they remain effective and compliant with relevant legislation and best practices. Our evaluation and review process includes the following steps:

Regular Reviews: Forest School SA will, at a minimum, review the policies and procedures once every 5 years as required by the Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017. This review will involve a comprehensive assessment of the policy and procedures to identify any areas for improvement or updates.

Stakeholder Consultation: Forest School SA will consult with stakeholders, including staff, volunteers, children, young people, and their families, to gather feedback and insights on the effectiveness of the policy and procedures.

External Audit: Forest School SA may engage an external auditor or consultant to conduct an independent audit of our Child Safe Environment Policy and procedures. This audit will help identify any gaps or areas for improvement.

Compliance Statement: Forest School SA will lodge a new Child Safe Environments Compliance Statement with the Department of Human Services each time we review and update our policy. This statement confirms that our organisation is compliant with the requirements of the Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017.

Continuous Improvement: Forest School SA will continuously seek opportunities to improve our Child Safe Environment Policy and procedures based on feedback, best practices, and changes in legislation or regulations.

Training and Awareness: Forest School SA will provide regular training and awareness sessions for staff and volunteers on the Child Safe Environment Policy and procedures to ensure they are up-to-date and understand their responsibilities.

By following this evaluation and review process, Forest School SA aims to maintain a safe and supportive environment for all children and young people participating in our programs.